

A NEW VISION FOR SOMATIC PSYCHOLOGY: Stanley Keleman's Formative Approach

Formative psychology is based in the evolutionary process in which life continually forms the next series of shapes, from birth through maturity to old age. At conception each person is given a biological and emotional inheritance, but it is through voluntary effort that a human fulfills the potential for forming a personal life. Form gives rise to feeling. When individual identity is grounded in somatic reality, we can say: I know who I am by how I experience myself.

Formative psychology gives a philosophy and method of how to work with our life. We learn to regenerate our emotional and instinctual vitality, to inhabit our body, and to incorporate our excitement and emotional aliveness. The goal of formative practice is to use daily life to practice being present and to create an adult self and reality. I proceed from the premise that we are each conceived as an adult and that we grow the adults we are meant to be.

All of us are in a continual process of forming, stabilizing, and reforming our adult reality. This process of forming and reforming is a continuous extension and contraction of tissue motility, a reflex that is an unbroken chain through our life. Pulsation is an essential expression of our hormonal and emotional life. The pulse process, like the heartbeat, is crucial in the maintaining our body shape and development. A continuous pulse organizes cycles of arousal. When pulsation is inhibited or overstimulated, our somatic, emotional and mental life also changes.

In the practice of forming, we work with the pulsation patterns of the soma and restore the body's natural rhythm and vitality. The areas of voluntary management in the brain are used and undergo growth.

There is a methodology to formative psychology that I call the Bodying Practice. The Bodying Practice engages the voluntary part of the brain to work with the

reflex, nonvolitional somatic functions. The brain can suggest patterns of behavior as well as form an image of its own body to have a relationship with itself. Of first importance is to be bodied, to form one's body in living the stages of our somatic existence.

The Bodying Practice is inaugurated by intensifying whatever we recognize as our present somatic-emotional stance. This intensifying is meant to magnify the pattern of our way of being present along with its images, memories, and thoughts. We can then disorganize what we have voluntarily done and in so doing learn how we can have some say over what we do. This helps bring into relief the reflex or unknown structures that have been inaccessible to us. It is similar to throwing a pebble into the water and initiating rings of response. In this sequence, we become familiar with how we organize our actions and how we can use our brains to affect our responses and feelings. The work of the exercises is to form an adult soma and brain, and an adult emotionality in social relationships.

The work is not only meant to be intimate with past structures and how to disorganize them, but it is also about having a tool for present and future situations.

The exercises are done slowly in frame-by-frame fashion to discover one's own speed and to compensate for somatic anesthesia—to become intimate with the unforming and forming sensation of the pulse pattern.

To work somatically in this way is to bring about a shift in recognition and to experience the way we organize to be present, to solve problems and to try on the new shapes of expression. It also organizes a dialogue between body and brain which shifts the patterns of meaning and order. We begin to live our destiny, our somatic inheritance. We begin to empower ourselves in forming our adult and its relationships.